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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the history and current circumstances of education in East Feliciana Parish (Louisiana) in the context of its participation in the Delta Rural Systemic Initiative (RSI), which aims to improve science and mathematics achievement through systemic reform. This report describes the parish's history, demography, and economic condition; the school system and its involvement with the Delta RSI; and progress on the National Science Foundation's "six drivers of educational system reform": implementation of standards-based curriculum, supportive policies, convergence of resources to support math and science programs, broad-based parent and community support, improved student achievement, and improved equity of achievement. The parish lies in the heart of Louisiana's plantation country and has low educational attainment and high rates of poverty, teen pregnancy, single parenthood, and unemployment. Student aspirations are low and place little value on education. The school system serves approximately 2,900 students, about 80 percent Black, in three elementary, two middle, and two high schools. (Most White students attend private schools.) The RSI attempts to increase local capacity to improve math and science education by providing professional development and technical assistance and fostering resource convergence and community engagement. Evaluators found weak or no evidence of developing success on four drivers of reform and moderate evidence of progress on the other two. Although this school system is the type targeted by the RSI, the RSI intervention did not fit local needs. The standards-based curriculum did not connect with student/community needs, professional development was undermined by high teacher turnover, and state-mandated high-stakes testing had negative impacts. (SV)

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A Case Study of East Feliciana Parish (Louisiana) School District and Its Role as a Partner in the NSF-Supported Delta Rural Systemic Initiative (RSI)

Prepared

for

The NSF Rural Systemic Initiatives Evaluation Study

by

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Foreword

On behalf of The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University and the site visitation team for the NSF Rural Systemic Initiatives Evaluation Study, I want to express gratitude and appreciation to the officials of East Feliciana Parish (Louisiana) School District for their willingness to include this community in our study for the National Science Foundation. First, Superintendent Daisy Slane was receptive to the request to conduct a site visit to this community and opened the doors of the district for our formal visit. I especially want to thank Ms. Pam Stalder for her efforts in coordinating our visit and helping us understand the schools and the community. In this role, she was organized, open, and honest in her responses to our many questions and greatly appreciated by the team. Others in the school district who deserve appreciative recognition are Ms. Anna Lou Thompson and Ms. Sandra Quiett as well as the principals and teachers who opened their schools and classrooms to the team. They made us feel welcome and, while they face many challenges, they are a hardworking and dedicated core of professionals. Also, a special note of appreciation goes to Ms. Brenda Nixon, who serves as the University/School Science Liaison for the Louisiana Systemic Initiatives and as a Regional Coordinator for the Delta RSI. Her perspective of this school district, the ongoing reform efforts of the state, and her general understanding of good science and math instruction were valuable to the team and the development of this report. Finally, we thank each and every person who met with us and shared their perspectives on the community and the schools of East Feliciana Parish.

This was an enjoyable visit, and we hope this report provides a fair and accurate description of the community, school, and efforts to provide a quality education for the students of this parish. While we learned a great deal about education in an area for which there are considerable economic limitations and other major challenges, we also gained an understanding and appreciation for some of the major barriers for systemic reform and the value of recognizing little successes and signs of improvement whereever and whenever they occur.

Jerry G. Horn
Principal Research Associate

A Case Study
of
East Feliciana Parish (Louisiana) School District and Its Role as a Partner in the NSF-Supported Delta Rural Systemic Initiative (RSI)

East Feliciana Parish is located in the heart of English Louisiana's Plantation Country where cotton was once king. The parish occupies a land area of 453.4 square miles (290,200 acres) of which 2.3 square miles or 1,464 acres are covered by water. Geographically, it is strategically located in the southeastern part of the state, immediately (about 30 minutes by automobile) north of Baton Rouge, the capital of Louisiana, and it extends north to the Louisiana-Mississippi state line.

The two major towns in the parish are Jackson, with a population of about 3,900, and the county (parish) seat of Clinton, with a population of around 1,900. The countryside is composed of rolling hills and beautifully forested areas. It is described in an East Feliciana Parish Tourist Commission brochure as having "a perfect blend of some of the best examples of Greek Revival, Victorian and Carolina style architecture." Having been a part of the country in which large land grants were made and even once a part of the Republic of West Florida, the area was occupied by plantations owned and operated largely by persons with English and German ancestry, some of whom had moved west from the Carolinas and others directly from Europe. The Rural Life Museum and Windrush Gardens in Baton Rouge probably provide an accurate portrayal of the lifestyles and cultures of the preindustrial Louisiana. A typical plantation would have included a number of slave cabins, kitchen, smokehouse, barns, gristmill, sugar house, an overseer's house, the owner's home, and possibly a church, blacksmith's shop, and other structures to support the large farming expanses of the time. From artifacts found today, it is evident that the area had a number of Indian settlements long before the area was explored or settled by Europeans.

The Civil War had a major impact on this parish and the people residing here. In Jackson, there are historical markers recognizing Pvt. Joe Fluker C.S.A. who died as a 17 year old confederate soldier as he was pursuing members of the Union cavalry. He was the seventh son from the Fluker family, of Aspohodel Plantation, to die in the Civil War, as did his father. Another historical marker is positioned at the burial site of Confederate Lt. Col. John C. McKowen, who is recognized as the capturer of Union Brigadier General Neal Dow during the siege of Port Hudson. Prior to the encirclement of Port Hudson (12 miles west of Jackson) by Union troops, the Confederates utilized the Clinton-Port Hudson Railroad as their main artery for moving vital supplies, such as ammunition, and troops. During the siege of Port Hudson, it is reported in locally distributed literature that

> Yankee troops ran roughshod through Jackson and the surrounding area in quest of livestock and forage and to disperse Rebel cavalry. There were many large and minor skirmishes. Two major clashes occurred in Jackson, one at the Jackson Crossroads (La. 68 & 10), and another that began on the grounds of Centenary College, drifting across town to Graveyard Hill in

front of the Asylum. Another large battle took place on the western outskirts of Clinton on Pretty Creek.

In the battle of Graveyard Hill, Confederate troops charged across the creek at Centenary College, ascended the slopes beyond, and overran a Union artillery battery positioned at the top of the hill. In addition to the capture of 30 Union troops, another 100 were killed as well as 12 members of the Confederate army. Reportedly, the Union troops, which numbered between 350 and 500 men, were on an expedition to recruit Negroes for the Twelfth Corps d'Afrique.

Union troops occupied Jackson for almost two years after the fall of Port Hudson. The Confederate forces used Centenary College facilities as a hospital until the railroad was cut by Union siege forces, and ultimately the college was used as a hospital by Union forces. Local literature indicates that "droves of blue-clad soldiers roamed the streets of Jackson." On the minute books of the college on October 7, 1861, was this notation: "Students have all gone to war. College suspended and God help the Right."

Centenary College and its students were intimately involved in the war, but its beginnings stand even today as an obvious point of pride for this community. Originally opened as the College of Louisiana in 1826 in an old courthouse and other buildings in Jackson, it grew for a period of time and eventually occupied its own facilities on the site known today as the Centenary State Commemorative Area. However, after less than 20 years, declining enrollments forced the closing of the college. Another college in Brandon Springs, Mississippi, also known as Centenary College and operated by the Methodist Church, was suffering from similar problems; it moved to Jackson and essentially merged the two colleges as one in 1845–Centenary College of Louisiana. The institution evolved and was at its peak just before the Civil War, with 250 students and 11 faculty members. Although it closed during the war, it reopened shortly after peace resumed, but struggled to regain enrollment and the prosperity of earlier times.

In search of a wider student population, the college moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1908, where it remains today. In Jackson, the Centenary State Commemorative Area now honors education throughout Louisiana. Student life and society in the nineteenth century are captured on this once-thriving and prestigious campus. The professor's house, an original faculty building, introduces visitors to Centenary College. From there visitors can stroll about the campus toward the West Wing dormitory, which houses exhibits and displays focusing on student life and education in Louisiana. In 1979, the Centenary State Commemorative Area was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Early railroads also played an important role in early East Feliciana Parish. In 1833, just eight years after the first railroads in the world were established in England, the Clinton/Port Hudson Railroad with a spur to Jackson was incorporated. This railroad was completed in 1839, but the rails were used earlier as a means for mules to pull cotton-laden cars because the founding group could not afford a steam locomotive. The railroad was used extensively during the Civil War for transporting

supplies and personnel, but after the war the Mississippi River began changing its course and left the town of Port Hudson dry, which finalized the demise of the Clinton/Port Hudson Railroad.

Jackson was founded in 1815 as the Seat of Justice for Feliciana Parish before the parish was divided into East and West in 1824. The town served as a land office as well as a center for learning and culture. Originally known as Bear Corners for the many wild black bears crossing nearby Thompson's Creek, later it was renamed Jackson in honor of General Andrew Jackson, who reportedly camped there with his troops on a return trip north. In its heyday around 1895, there is a report that the town had "11 general merchandise stores, a railroad, two first-class hotels, two well-established drug stores, two blacksmiths and a wide-awake newspaper."

Today, the historic district covers two-thirds of the town of Jackson and features more than 120 structures including banks, shops, homes, churches, and warehouses. However, one would be naive to believe that Jackson is a thriving community. Public lodging accommodations consist of a few bed and breakfast establishments and the Old Centenary Inn with 8 rooms. While the Inn is an attractive establishment with a collection of many historic objects and antiques and fits well into the historic district, it does not reflect a vibrant economy or a center of activity. Only a few yards down the street is a closed grocery store and a small restaurant. No fast food chain establishments are found in the town. Few other retail businesses are available to residents of Jackson, but there appears to be an effort to reclaim some of the past with an emphasis on refurbishing some of the grand old homes; the opening of small historic hotels (Old Centenary Inn and Milbank Historic House, among others); the opening of the Southern Belle Club Car for teas, luncheons, and small gatherings; and the establishment of a few antique stores or stores of collectibles, such as Milbank Gift Shop, Original Expressions, and Lockridge Cottage Gifts. There is a locally owned winery (Feliciana Cellars Winery) that is open for tours and wine tasting. Religions reflected in the churches of the area are Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic.

Homes in Jackson range considerably in age, size, and condition, which probably provides an accurate reflection of the distribution of wealth in the community. Obviously, there are homes of families of considerable means and others who struggle to maintain food and shelter on a daily basis.

Clinton, the center of government for the parish and the only other town of any size in East Feliciana, is located about 13 miles east of Jackson. Clinton was founded in 1824 as the seat of government for the newly created parish of East Feliciana. It is located on a tract of land that had been granted by the Spanish government to Lewis Yarbrough. Susan and John Bostwich and James Holmes purchased the land from Yarbrough and, after donating three lots to the new town—one for a courthouse, one for a spring (which still flows), and one for a jail—subdivided the rest and sold lots in the new town of Clinton. The town prospered in early years as the cotton trading point for the Clinton/Port Hudson Railroad. The East Feliciana Parish Courthouse, built around 1840, is reputed to be the oldest courthouse in continuous use, and immediately across the street is a block of offices known as "Lawyer's Row." Today, there are other private businesses located in this section. Other landmarks in the town include the Casa De Sue Winery, the Clinton Confederate Cemetery, the Jewish Cemetery, and a number of grand homes of the past, including George Hays House, the

Boatner-Record House, and the Marston House, among others that were structured largely during the 1830s to the 1870s.

As is true in Jackson, there are only a few available businesses for shopping, but there are several stores that specialize in antiques or collectibles. The first Saturday of each month is Community Market Day that provides sidewalk sales, food and beverages, and a Farmer's Market. Churches in the Historic District include the Clinton First Baptist Church (c. 1872) and St. Andrews Episcopal Church (c. 1871). One notable new industry in the town is a locally developed and owned company known as Cajun Injector. This business produces and markets marinades, devices for injecting marinades into a variety of meat products, and other specialized cooking apparatus. A former local restauranteur is the founder of the company, and it seems to be developing as a major industry for the area. It employs a number of local personnel in a variety of jobs, and there are plans for expansion of the company's operations in the Clinton area.

Another notable landmark in Clinton is the Silliman Institute (c. 1840-1890), which originally operated as a Female Collegiate Institute and served as a hospital during the Civil War. Currently, it is used as "private academy" that enrolls most of the area's white students.

The homes within Clinton and along the roads of the parish represent a highly divergent populace of old and new wealth and poverty. Timber and farming are clearly evident in drives through the countryside, but it is also clear that a number of new home sites and acreages are being carved out of these lands. While we have only the opinion of selected local personnel, we understand that these are the properties of persons who have rather well-paid positions in the Baton Rouge region and who commute on a daily basis.

One of the most notable elements of the parish is the presence of five state correctional institutions and a state hospital for the mentally ill. These facilities provide employment for many residents of the county as well as for those who commute to them from other areas, such as Baton Rouge.

There are no physicians or medical facilities listed in the phone directory that are closer than St. Francisville, Zachery, or Baton Rouge, all located in other parishes. Dentists listed in the Yellow Pages have offices in St. Francisville, Zachery, Baker, and Baton Rouge. While there may be periodic outreach medical services available to residents of the parish, it appears that none are immediately available on a daily basis in either of the larger towns of the parish, i.e., Jackson and Clinton.

The parish to the immediate west (West Feliciana Parish) is known as one of the wealthiest parishes in Louisiana due to the location of a large nuclear power plant, while East Feliciana Parish is known as one of the poorest. With the presence of such a high number of state facilities in a sparsely populated county/parish, there is an abnormal balance between tax-generating industries and state-owned/nontaxable properties in East Feliciana Parish. In concert with the power plant that provides a very large tax base for West Feliciana Parish, this clearly creates a sense of the "haves" and the "have-nots" between the parishes. This condition is exacerbated in East Feliciana Parish by the existing long-time poverty, particularly among the black population, and the wealth and power among

those associated with the "old money" and the increasing presence of well-educated, highly paid individuals who may reside but not work in the immediate area.

Just as Jackson was intimately involved in the Civil War, Pretty Creek on the west side of the town and the railroad yard were the scenes of fierce fighting during the Siege of Port Hudson in 1863. These battles are historically known as the Battles of Clinton.

Economically, today East Feliciana Parish ranks near the bottom of Louisiana parishes (54th out of 64) with a very low tax base. Within the parish's context of low economic wealth exists a minority of individuals with substantial wealth who have major influence over the political process. The majority are relatively poor with little political power. The plantation mentality is still present. The poor/powerless tend to vote and support issues as directed by those for whom they work. Their livelihood may well depend on keeping in the good graces of their employer. The gap between the rich and poor is great and reported to be growing.

Based on 1990 U.S. census data, statistical information about East Feliciana Parish is summarized below.

Population

Number of persons	19,211
Families	4,407
Households	5,589
Sex-	
Male	10,004
Female	9,207
Race-	
White	10,022
Black	9,083
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	23
Asian or Pacific Islander	22
Other race	61

Household Type and Relationship

In family households-	
Householder	4,407
Spouse	3,139
Child	6,511
Grandchild	863
Other relatives	589
Nonrelatives	182

In nonfamily households-
Householder living alone 1,096
Householder not living alone 86
Nonrelatives 119

In group quarters-
Institutionalized persons 2,159
Other persons in group quarters 60

Persons in Household
1 person 1,078
2 persons 1,482
3 persons 1,017
4 persons 965
5 persons 609
6 persons 228
7 or more persons 193

Residence in 1985
Same house in 1985 11,296
Different house in 1985-
Same county 2,870
Different state 557
Abroad in 1985 42

Employment–Place of Work (workers 16 years and over)
Worked in state of residence:
Worked in county of residence 2,928
Worked outside county of residence 3,110
Worked outside state of residence 124

Education
Race by school enrollment (persons 3 years and over)
White-
Enrolled in preprimary school 156
Enrolled in elementary or high school 1,890
Enrolled in college 247
Not enrolled in school 7,345
Black-
Enrolled in preprimary school 73
Enrolled in elementary or high school 2,265
Enrolled in college 280
Not enrolled in school 6,000

American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut-
- Enrolled in preprimary school 0
- Enrolled in elementary or high school 0
- Enrolled in college 0
- Not enrolled in school 14

Asian or Pacific Islander-
- Enrolled in preprimary school 0
- Enrolled in elementary or high school 0
- Enrolled in college 0
- Not enrolled in school 29

Other race-
- Enrolled in preprimary school 0
- Enrolled in elementary or high school 4
- Enrolled in college 4
- Not enrolled in school 58

Educational attainment (persons 25 years and over)
- Less than 9th grade 2,179
- 9th to 12th grade, no diploma 2,688
- High school graduate (includes equivalency) 4,097
- Some college, no degree 1,474
- Associate degree 173
- Bachelor's degree 682
- Graduate or professional degree 356

Educational attainment by race (white and black only) (persons 25 years and over)

White-
- Less than 9th grade 798
- 9th to 12th grade, no diploma 1,215
- High school graduate (includes equivalency) . 2,471
- Some college, no degree 1,106
- Associate degree 125
- Bachelor's degree 532
- Graduate or professional degree 324

Black-
- Less than 9th grade 1,341
- 9th to 12th grade, no diploma 1,458
- High school graduate (includes equivalency) . 1,609
- Some college, no degree 449
- Associate degree 48
- Bachelor's degree.....150
- Graduate or professional degree.....32

Occupation (employed persons 16 years and over)

- Managerial and professional speciality occupations-
  - Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations .. 348
  - Professional specialty occupations 791
- Technical, sales, and administrative support occupations-
  - Technicians and related support occupations 216
  - Sales occupations 458
  - Administrative support occupations, including clerical .. 754
- Service occupations-
  - Private household occupations 83
  - Protective service occupations 495
  - Service occupations, except protective and household .. 885
- Farming, forestry, and fishing occupations 298
- Precision production, craft, and repair occupations 789
- Operators, fabricators, and laborers-
  - Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors 433
  - Transportation and material moving occupations 401
  - Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers 283

Household Income in 1989

- Less than $5,000 737
- $5,000 to 9,999 628
- $10,000 to 19,999 1,402
- $20,000 to 39,999 1,700
- $40,000 to 59,999 658
- $60,000 to 99,999 370
- $100,00 to 149,999 61
- $150,000 or more 16

- Median household income in 1989 ..... $20,139
- Earnings in 1989
  - With earnings 4,228
  - No earnings 1,344
- Social security income in 1989
  - With social security income 1,416
  - Not social security income 4,156
- Public assistance income in 1989
  - With public assistance income 796
  - Not public assistance income 4,776
- Retirement income in 1989
  - With retirement income 872
  - Not retirement income 4,700

Poverty Status of White and Black School Age Children and Youth (number of persons 5 to 17 years)

White:	
Above	1,767
Below	257
Black:	
Above	1,156
Below	838

Housing

Value of owner-occupied housing units (number of units)

Less than $15,000	272
$15,000 to 29,999	387
$30,000 to 49,999	590
$50,000 to 99,999	854
$100,000 to 149,999	138
$150,000 to 199,999	36
$200,000 to 299,999	14
$300,000 to 499,999	5
$500,000 or more	3

Median value	$46,700

Year structure built (number of units)

1989 to March 1999	173
1980 to 1988	2,024
1950 to 1979	3,467
1949 or earlier	812

Median year structure built	1973

Kitchen facilities (number of units)

Complete kitchen facilities	6,301
Lacking complete kitchen facilities	175

Plumbing facilities (number of units)

Complete plumbing facilities	6,274
Lacking complete plumbing facilities	202

In summary, as a whole the residents of East Feliciana Parish are poor, and they attained less education and are generally lower than the state on most socioeconomic indicators. Teen pregnancy in the parish was reported to be 33 percent in 1996, compared with 18.9 percent for the state and 12.9 percent for the nation. Single parenthood, based on 1990 U.S. census data, was 22.7 percent in the parish and 19.1 and 14.8 percent respectively for state and nation. The unemployment rate is

high, and the reported aspiration of many young adults is to find employment in the state-operated mental health and correctional institutions that have provided employment for their parents and families for generations. In other words, there is a perception among many school personnel that the youth have educational expectations and career goals that are essentially like their parents, which would not call for substantial changes in the schools' educational programs in math and science.

Education in East Feliciana Parish

Through the years a number of school consolidations, closures, and mergers have resulted in a parish school district consisting of operational schools with 1998-99 October 1 memberships as follows.

Clinton High School (grades 9-12) . . . . . 412 students
Clinton Middle School (grades (5-8) 471
Clinton Elementary School (grades PK, K-4) 546*

Jackson School Complex (PK, K-12) 1,149**

Slaughter Elementary School (PK, K-6) 277

*In 1999-2000, the 5th grade was moved from the Clinton Middle School to the Clinton Elementary School with a resulting enrollment of more than 700 students at the elementary school.

**The Jackson Complex operates as three educational levels (PK-5, 6-8, and 9-12) with a principal for each level.

In East Feliciana Parish there are two state-approved nonpublic schools, a small Christian Bible school and the much larger Silliman Institute, with a student enrollment of about 650 students and 20 teachers. Silliman serves an almost totally white population and is physically located within a few blocks of Clinton Elementary and Clinton High School. Silliman Institute began operating as a private K-12 school in 1972, which corresponds to the date of the desegregation order that affects this school. In contrast, the East Feliciana Parish School District has an enrollment of about 2,900 students, of which there is about a 80:20 ratio (black to white) racial mix in the public schools. It is estimated that 600 or more white students attend private schools of some form in Louisiana or in nearby Mississippi. In the public school district, most white teachers and central office staff with school-age children send them to Silliman or some other private school.

As reported in 1997-98 Louisiana Department of Education resource documents, there were 148 high school graduates (117 black and 31 white) from the public high schools (Jackson and Clinton) and 53 (all white) graduates from the private high school in the parish. The average daily attendance for students in 1997-98 was 95.5 percent for the PK-8 level and 91.5 percent at the 9-12 level. In 1998-99, the average daily attendance was 95.3 percent in the elementary schools, 95.5 percent in the middle/junior high schools, and 94.1 percent in the high schools. In all schools, there were 226 in-school suspensions (7.2 percent), 194 out-of-school suspensions (6.2 percent), 17 in-school expulsions (0.6 percent), and 11 out-of-school expulsions (0.4 percent). These disciplinary actions,

calculated as percentages, are below the state average. For example, for the state the percentage of in-school suspensions was 8.14 and 10.5 for out-of-school suspensions.

Students served by exceptional children programs in 1997-98:

Age Group 0-2	9
Age Group 3-5	44
Age Group 6-11	123
Age Group 12-17	133
Age Group 18-21	23
Age Group 22 and up	1

The number of students served by category of special needs:

Mental Disabilities	76
Hard of Hearing	5
Speech/Language Impairments	99
Visual Impairments	2
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	1
Other Health Impairments	14
Learning Disabilities	80
Multiple Disabilities	2
Infant/Toddler w/Disabilities	9
Noncategorical Preschool	44

No students that were hospital/homebound or educationally handicapped were reported to be served. Sixteen students (5 in the 6-11 age group and 11 in the 12-17 age group) were identified as "gifted." Curiously, there were no students identified as gifted in a 1997-98 study of the Jackson School Complex by the Louisiana Department of Education.

In the public school district, about 82 percent of the students qualify for free lunches and another 8 percent qualify for reduced fees for lunches. In 1997-98, the school district served a daily average of 1,198 breakfasts and 2,221 lunches. This produced a federal (USDA) reimbursement of $880,293 for the school food service.

The East Feliciana Parish School District is governed by an elected 12 member board and administered by a superintendent appointed by the board. The current school superintendent is Dr. Daisy F. Slan. The 1999-00 school board is made up of 11 men and 1 woman. Mailing addresses for the board indicate that 3 are from Clinton, 4 from Jackson, 2 from Wilson, 1 from Slaughter, and 1 from Ethel. The officers of the school board are a president and a vice president. A vast number of the teachers and many of the administrators have residences outside the parish and school district. They commute to their jobs on a daily basis, although some indicated that they purchased some of their groceries and gasoline from local businesses to demonstrate support for the parish.

In 1997-98, there were 490 full-time staff (teachers, administrators, and office/clerical/support staff members) in the district. An almost equal number of black (99) and white (97) classroom teachers were employed in the parish's public schools in 1997-98. No other racial/ethnic groups were represented. A similar distribution is found among school/building level administrators, i.e., 7 black and 6 white. The current superintendent is a black female. The average teacher's salary during 1997-98 was $26,772, compared with $25,948 in 1996-97. There is a very high turnover of teachers in the district, up to 70 percent in some years. Very few of the teachers who are assigned to teach math and science are certified, which is apparently a problem all over the state but is particularly evident in this school district. Schools in adjoining parishes are reported to have teacher salaries from $6,000-8,000 above what is paid in East Feliciana, which puts this district in a weak competitive position. Overall, 66 faculty members (or 42 percent) in 1998-99 had a master's degree or higher.

Three universities with major teacher education programs are within easy commuting distance of East Feliciana Parish. These are Southern University and Louisiana State University in the Baton Rouge area and Southeast Louisiana University in Hammond. All of these schools provide undergraduate, graduate, and professional development opportunities for educators. Additionally, these institutions, as well as community colleges and a number of vocational/technical schools, provide postsecondary education and training for persons in East Feliciana Parish.

Funding for the public schools is a shared responsibility between the local district and the state, which provides a foundation of $3,300/student and additional funds for capital outlay, such as expenditures for facilities. In the most recent financial report made public by the Louisiana Department of Education, the following district revenues for East Feliciana Parish are shown below for 1997-98.

District Revenues by Source

Revenue Source	Amount	Percent of District Total	State Average Percent
Local	$4,157,938	25.0	37.6
State	$9,921,525	59.7	51.0
Federal	$2,541,740	15.3	11.4
Total	$16,621,203	100.0	100.0

Over the period 1995-96 through 1997-98, the expenditures per pupil in this district, as compared with all districts in the state, are as follows.

Expenditures Per Pupil

Basis	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98
Local	$4,517	$4,720	$5,209
State	$4,772	$5,073	$5,584
Local as Percent of State	94.7%	93.0%	93.3%

A comprehensive plan for accountability and improvement was described in a brochure distributed by the Louisiana Department of Education in Fall 1998. In the brochure, entitled "*reaching* for result," the following statement is made:

> In response to the need for radical change in the way we educate our children, the Governor, the Legislature, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the State Superintendent of Education, business, educators, and the public worked together to develop a plan for fundamental changes in our classrooms focusing on improving student achievement. Technological shifts in the workplace require more challenging programs designed to increase students' learning and to teach higher level skills.
>
> These changes begin with new higher level content standards, new local curricula, new and more rigorous tests, and a system of School and District Accountability to measure individual schools' success in education their students.

The brochure goes on to explain the plan:

> Afer analyzing numerous accountability models in other states and learning from their experiences, a system of accountability was developed for Louisiana. This system is based on the beliefs that every school can improve and every child can and must learn at significantly higher levels. The system is designed to measure and report on student achievement, and encourage and support continued school improvement by:
>
> - clearly establishing the state goals for schools and students.
> - creating an easy way to communicate to schools and the public how well a school is performing.
> - recognizing schools for effectively demonstrating growth in student achievement, and
> - focusing attention, energy and resources on schools needing help in improving.

Under this plan, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) will establish 10- and 20-year goals that are "measurable and attainable." Each school will receive a "School Performance Score" based on the following:

LEAP 21	60 percent
Iowa Tests	30 percent
Attendance Rate	10 percent, Grades K- 6
	5 percent, Grades 7-12
Dropout Rate	5 percent, Grades 7-12

Defining elements for the accountability system are listed below:

- Academically Unacceptable Schools—those with a performance score lower than or equal to 30 on the above source and distribution of data.

- Growth Targets—the amount of improvement needed every 2 years to achieve the 10- and 20- year goals.

- Growth Labels—assigned to each school to show how well it has met the biannual target, i.e.:

  - Exemplary Academic Growth: schools exceeding their growth targets by 5 points
  - Recognized Academic Growth: schools meeting their growth targets or exceeding them by less than 5 points
  - Minimal Academic Growth: schools improving but not meeting their growth targets
  - School in Decline: schools with flat or declining school performance scores

- Rewards–provided for schools meeting or exceeding their growth targets

- Corrective Actions–support and assistance provided for schools failing to meet growth targets

The schedule for the accountability plan is summarized below.

1998-1999: Initial school performance and growth targets calculated for grades K-8; "academically unacceptable" schools identified

1999-2000: K-8 "academically unacceptable" schools begin corrective actions

2000-2001: Initial school performance scores and growth targets calculated for grades 9-12; 9-12 schools determined to be "academically unacceptable" begin corrective actions Growth labels given to K-8 schools based on schools' success in reaching their growth targets to determine which schools (1) enter, continue, or exit corrective actions or (2) qualify for rewards

2003-2004: Growth labels given to K-12 schools based on schools' success in reaching their growth targets to determine which schools (1) enter, continue, or exit corrective actions or (2) qualify for rewards

An important statement concerning the new plan for school improvement and accountability is illustrative of the shifting of responsibility or at least focuses attention on action at the local level:

> A new era of higher standards and greater responsibility for all stakeholders has begun for education in Louisiana. The state has raised expectations and clarified goals for Louisiana schools, while shifting from state control and mandates to school and district decision-making and flexibility. Based on the state's new higher level content standards, districts now develop their own curricula and exert more local authority over how and where to spend resources to meet specific needs.

The Delta Rural Systemic Initiative Project

The East Feliciana Parish School District is a participating member in the Delta Rural Systemic Initiative (Delta RSI). This project includes 106 school districts, 557 schools, and more than 230,000 students in the Delta states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The mission of this RSI is

> . . . to bring about systemic reform in the rural communities of the Delta region to ensure that Delta youth demonstrate globally competitive levels of knowledge and skills in science, mathematics, and technology for the achievement of professional and personal success.

The RSI's goals are listed below:

> Enhance the K-12 learning environment in the targeted counties and parishes to address each child's needs and promote each child's achievement in science, mathematics, and technology.
>
> Increase the capacity of local communities to build and maintain quality science, mathematics, and technology educational programs for each community's children.
>
> Establish mechanisms to champion policy development and implementation at local and state levels in support of sustained reform in science, mathematics, and technology.
>
> Create regional infrastructure that will utilize intra- and interstate alliances to develop sustainable regional improvements in science, mathematics, and technology.

There are five program elements of the Delta RSI:

- Leadership Institutes
- Request for Proposal for Stimulating Systemic Reform
- Technical Assistance Provided by Field Coordinators
- Resource Convergence

- Community Engagement

Public school districts eligible for participation in the Delta RSI are those located in the counties and parishes of the Lower Mississippi Delta Commission with a Beale Code of 6-9 (low population density) and in which 30 percent or greater of the school-age children are living in poverty, i.e., qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.

The Delta RSI, with administrative headquarters at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi, is directed by Dr. Charles Alexander, and the Project Director is Dr. Alfred Hall. Mrs. Brenda Nixon serves as the Delta RSI Louisiana Field Coordinator. She is also the University/School Science Liaison with the Louisiana Systemic Initiatives Program (LaSIP). Her office is in Baton Rouge, which makes her readily accessible to the school district, and her dual role with LaSIP helps ensure compatibility between the two projects and maximizes the opportunity for collaboration. (Mrs. Nixon recently replaced Mrs. Nicole Honoree as the field coordinator for the Delta RSI for this area.) Five other field offices and coordinators serve other areas of the three-state consortium. The external evaluator for the Delta RSI is Mr. Kirk Minnick, president of Minnick & Associates, Inc. with headquarters in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

A Regional Advisory Council, an entity to address one of the major goals of the project (create a regional infrastructure), has been developed to ". . . promote the goals and mission of Delta RSI in targeted counties/parishes of the project in order to enhance and improve the quality of Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education for the students in the rural counties of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi." The council membership consists of stakeholders who have displayed leadership in their area(s) of expertise.

The council is organized with a slate of officers (chairperson, vice chairperson, and secretary), the Executive Committee, and five standing committees, each with a title and suggested charges related to the goals of the Delta RSI and the RSI program of the National Science Foundation. A listing of the standing committees is shown below:

- Standards Based Curriculum Committee
- Community Engagement/Public Relations Committee
- Technical Assistance/Professional Development Committee

- Resource Convergence Committee
- Policy and Finance Committee

Members of the council are expected to

- be available to help the Field Coordinator promote the goals/mission of RSI.
- promote systemic reform.
- attend major Delta RSI events, i.e., DRSI Regional Conference and the DRSI Annual Conference.

In effect, the role of the field coordinators is defined by the council and, beyond NSF funding, the Regional Advisory Council or some form of it will be the sustaining element of this project.

In the case of the Delta RSI overall, about 30 of the 106 school districts have not participated in the Leadership Institute. Participation in the Institute is a prerequisite/requirement in order to receive an implementation grant, which are made to support reform and improvement plans at the local school district level. For the current year, these grants are of the magnitude of about $10,000 per school district. Likely because of lack of experience, limited number of teachers, turnover of key personnel, etc., a number of school districts had problems developing an acceptable plan for reform and improvement. To address these problems, each school district participating in the Delta RSI has identified two persons (usually a math teacher and a science teacher) as "points of contact" and "key leaders" (about 1 per 15-20 points of contact) have been designated to facilitate communication and cooperation. Also, the Delta RSI administrators are considering developing cooperative agreements with each district. If implemented, a signed cooperative agreement would be a requirement and the basis for future involvement with Delta RSI activities and receipt of services.

The idea of "teacher leaders," a practice in some other RSIs, was rejected for this project due to the high turnover rate among teachers. Also, two of the three states served by the Delta RSI (Arkansas and Louisiana) have NSF-supported State Systemic Initiative (SSI) projects. Efforts are made to coordinate activities between the RSI and the SSI in a given state. Much of the program level coordination is accomplished by the field coordinators, which results in a positive and close to seamless effort from the perspective of individual teachers.

At the local level, the RSI project is closely aligned with Project SMILE (Structuring Mathematics Initiatives with Leaders in Education), a K-9 mathematics project that included 16 workshop days during the summer and ongoing professional development during the school year. The project has served as a catalyst for change and improvement of mathematics education, and it has enabled teachers to create activities that introduced manipulatives and other hands-on approaches to mathematics instruction. The primary contact for the RSI project in this school district is Ms. Pam Stalder, whose overall role in the district might be comparable to a federal and state projects coordinator or director in many school districts. Technically, she is identified as the Co-Director of Project SMILE. The other Co-Director is Ms. Deloreas Simoneaux of Southeastern Louisiana University. Two persons who serve as co-site coordinators and math facilitators for the project are

Ms. Anna Lou Thompson, with a focus on grades K-3, and Ms. Sandra Quiett, with a focus on grades 4-9. Mr. Knight Roddy serves as science facilitator for the entire parish school district. Mr. Roddy's role is to develop and formalize the science curriculum so that it is aligned with state standards and benchmarks, to generally work for improvement of the science curriculum, and to provide assistance to individual teachers whenever needed and practical. A notable activity in which he has engaged is the creation of a "nature walk" on the grounds of the Clinton Elementary School, with a similar project near the Jackson complex. He brings a strong knowledge base and science teaching experience to his work, and this, along with his ongoing graduate studies in science education at Louisiana State University, makes him an ideal person for this position. Project SMILE was written in response to a Delta RSI issued Request for Proposal. The project is intended to

> . . . allow teachers to empower students to become problem solvers, develop concepts to make generalizations, apply skills, make mathematical connections, and assess their own learning.

Monies to support the program come from LaSIP and the Delta RSI in addition to local resources and in-kind commitments. Focusing on mathematics at the K-9 level, 42 (or about half of the eligible teachers in the district) formally participated in the 1999 summer project, and participation is mandatory for the professional development activities project during the academic/school year. The district heard about the Delta RSI through a leadership workshop offered by the RSI. Most of the monies received from the Delta RSI go into sponsorship or cosponsorship of workshops and professional development activities for teachers and for one-half of Ms. Quiett's salary, who serves as one of the two math facilitators for the district. The arrangement for Ms. Quiett's appointment is with Southeast Louisiana University.

Student Achievement/Performance Results

There are a number of perspectives about student achievement, and each has its own merits. Some would argue that every child can learn and that any measures of achievement must reflect academic growth of all students. Others would argue that group scores, i.e., class averages or percentages of students achieving a certain designated level or proficiency, is the most appropriate way to determine and report student achievement. Others might argue that progress toward narrowing the gap between high and low achievers should be a primary goal. In an area like East Feliciana Parish where almost half of the adult population have not completed high school, a reasonable goal for the school and students is to increase the graduation rate. Employers and college/university personnel might recognize success as an increased graduation rate of persons able to successfully enter the work force or begin college studies or some other form of postsecondary training. Within any community, you find proponents of each of these perspectives of student achievement and school effectiveness. At the same time, governing boards, legislators, and program officers of funding agencies (public and private) want to know the extent to which an individual program impacted on the achievement of students and the school as a whole. Since most schools are engaged in multiple efforts of school improvement, attempts to answer this question become quite speculative. For purposes of this case study, we are attempting to understand one school and community's efforts to improve math and

science education; and East Feliciana Parish first chose to concentrate on math (because it is an immediate testing area by the state agencies) and to add an emphasis in science at a later time.

The most public reporting of student achievement is found in the East Feliciana Parish's District Composite Report available from the Louisiana Department of Education. The most recent data on student achievement at the time of this case study are for 1998-99. All regular education students enrolled as of October 1, 1998, were eligible/intended to be included in the assessment. Certain other provisions apply to special education students, students with limited English proficiency, students in alternative programs, and other disabled students. Because of the focus of this study, only math and science scores are reported (See Table 1).

The criterion-referenced tests (CRT) are a part of the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP). The CRT is administered to public school students at specified grade levels in April of each year. At the secondary level, the CRT is the Graduation Exit Examination (GEE). The results are reported as the percentage of students who met or exceeded state curriculum content standards. The mathematics component is initially administered to students at the 10th grade level. The first opportunity for students to take the science component is at the 11th grade level. The results of the 1998-99 administration of the CRT-GEE in East Feliciana Parish School District for the subject areas of math and science are reported in Table 2.

A norm-referenced test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, is a part of the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program. The results of this test are not reported in this case study because the results in the composite report are an aggregate of all subject areas.

For students from East Feliciana Parish School District who took the American College Test (ACT) in 1998-99, the average scores for various groups are as follows:

Clinton High School	16.0
Jackson School Complex	16.9
District (public)	16.3
State (public and private)	19.6
Nation (public and nonpublic)	21.0

Unfortunately, we were not able to locate data that would permit a reasonable and appropriate analysis of trends of student achievement in the district. The Louisiana Educational Assessment Program does provide a plan that will permit this kind of effort over the next several years. However, this assumes that the content of the assessment instruments reflects the standards and curriculum of the state and district and is a true reflection of the instructional content to which students are exposed.

The high stakes testing that is being implemented as a part of the state's assessment and accountability program has had a definite impact on the instruction in these schools. Teachers openly admit that they take instructional time to prepare students for testing, i.e., explaining the importance

of the test, completing work sheets with math problems/exercises that are thought to be reflective of the type but not the actual questions on the test, etc. Teachers relate stories about children who become physically ill during the testing period because of the felt pressures and consequences of their success or failure. Questions have been raised about whether less is actually being taught as a result of the testing program, and there seem to be some legitimate issues about this. The long-term consequences of a school not meeting its target goals are not fully understood.

Table 1

LEAP 21 Mathematics Test Results (Proficiency Level Percentages) for Grades 4 and 8

Area/School	Percentage Scoring at Designated Proficiency Level				
Grade 4	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Basic**	**Approaching Basic**	**Unsatisfactory**
Clinton Elem.	0.0	0.0	27.8	32.0	40.2
Jackson Complex	0.0	1.4	15.5	25.4	57.7
Slaughter Elem.	2.4	12.2	34.1	22.0	29.3
District	0.5	2.9	24.9	27.8	44.0
State	1.7	7.8	31.7	24.0	34.8
Grade 8	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Basic**	**Approaching Basic**	**Unsatisfactory**
Clinton Elem.	0.0	1.9	13.0	23.1	62.0
Jackson Complex	0.0	2.1	16.0	16.0	66.0
Slaughter Elem.	(Does not have students above grade 6)				
District	0.0	2.0	14.4	19.8	63.9
State	1.3	4.4	33.3	21.3	39.7

Table 2

Criterion-Reference Test (CRT)–GEE Results in Math and Science for 1998-99

School/Reference Group	Percentage Passing Mathematics Component	Percentage Passing Science Component
Clinton High School	72	73
Jackson School Complex	76	68
District	74	71
State	74	80

When asked about how they engage in systemic reform with a 70 percent teacher turnover rate, the reply was, "We reform every year because we have a new set of teachers." Although the professional development work is "mandated" during the academic year, there is an apparent drop-off of attendance or less than full engagement in the actual work.

While Project SMILE is supposed to be a cooperative endeavor with Southeast Louisiana University, the last year has not been problem-free. Questions have arisen about the budget and about whether one of the site coordinators has to resign from the parish school in order to be employed using project monies. At times, administrators of the parish school have been quite frustrated about the lack of responsiveness and the lack of a cooperative spirit that should exist. On the other hand, instructors from this university were observed working with the summer workshops, and they indicated a high degree of interest and commitment to this project.

Observations of classrooms provided an array of teaching methods and techniques. Most of the classrooms, particularly those at the elementary school level, are colorful and reflect considerable effort by teachers to make the rooms attractive and interesting. Teachers are quick to point out that they have increased the use of manipulatives in the teaching of mathematics and that they are making use of many of the activities to which they were introduced in the summer and during the academic year's professional development activities. Some of the materials used during the summer institute have been packaged as instructional kits and made available for use during the regular school year.

The schools and the hallways were orderly, and children displayed good behavior. At the Clinton Elementary School, an additional grade level was added this year, which produced what appears to be an overcrowded situation. Temporary structures had to be moved to the campus to accommodate the students, and the school simply appeared to be overcrowded. Overall, this seems to be a distraction from the rich learning environment that one would hope to see.

Clearly, a bright spot at the Clinton Elementary School facility was the development of a "natural/ environmental" area in the woods very near the school. Through the efforts of several organizations,

Mr. Roddy has begun to develop a valuable resource for this school. He is genuinely interested in the idea, and several teachers and students related positive experiences with this area.

The Jackson Complex serves as the school for the western part of the parish, and this area was often cited as being different and populated by families who were less supportive of schools. While we have no particular evidence to support this point of view, this is clearly a perception among a number of persons with whom we spoke. The complex houses a pre-K through 12 school, which makes it appear to be quite large. However, there have been attempts to separate the various age groups in various ways.

The elementary school in Slaughter provides a different environment for teachers and students. While located in a small, rural settlement, an increasing number of new families migrated from the more affluent and suburban areas of Baton Rouge. The school is administered by a long-time principal in the district. He is an interesting, down-to-earth individual who has some definite views about life and schooling in rural Louisiana. He has been principal at this school for many years, and he sees students in the school today who are children or grandchildren of former Slaughter Elementary School students. The principal takes great pride in his school and the teachers that he has selected and encouraged to stay over the years. The teacher turnover at this school is much lower than in the other schools.

There are computers in most, if not all, classrooms, and computer lab facilities are available for group or individual work. During times that the study team was in the school, we saw little actual involvement of students and/or teachers with computers or other forms of technology.

A unique activity for providing instructional materials, books, teacher guides, etc. for parent use has been created and is successfully operating at the Clinton Elementary School. The young woman charged with operating the checkout facility is probably paid as an aide, but she is very well known within the community. This makes it easy for parents, most of whom are not well educated, to come to the center and check out materials to help them understand the concepts and skills to which they are being exposed and to provide parental assistance to students at home. Actually, the aide gives the parents a "report card" on their work, which is a novel and seemingly quite popular idea.

Progress and/or Presence of the Drivers of Educational System Reform

Evidence of the presence or progress toward fulfilling the intent of the Six Drivers for Educational System Reform, as disseminated by the National Science Foundation, was a major focal point of the visitation team's work. In the following section, these findings are summarized.

Driver #1: Implementation of a comprehensive, standards-based curricula and/or instructional materials that are aligned with instruction and assessment available to every student served by the system and its partners.

The East Feliciana Parish School District is engaged in a focused effort to address the reform and improvement of each curriculum. To date, most of the efforts have centered around the mathematics

curriculum at the elementary and middle school levels with a more recent parallel focus on science. In a November 1998 issue of *Louisiana Education Reform: Reaching for Results*, a publication of the Louisiana Department of Education, the following statement was made.

> For the first time, Louisiana has rigorous content standards in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Foreign Language, and the Arts, that enable all Louisiana students to become lifelong learners and productive citizens.

Local efforts to develop a written curriculum that is based on state standards and to align appropriate instructional techniques to these standards and expectations are in process. The extremely high turnover of teachers (50-70 percent per year) and the necessity to use uncertified and likely unqualified teachers signal an even greater need for an organized and publicly accessible curriculum. To ensure some continuity in the curriculum, a part of the facilitator's role is to develop the curriculum and to assist in its implementation throughout the schools. Clearly, there are several pieces of evidence that both are occurring, but, at the same time, there is recognition that this process is far from complete and, in fact, it will probably never be completed. Reform in this school district, with its unique teaching corps, is an annual event. Continual attention must be given to refining efforts among continuing teachers and to introducing the curriculum and the associated expectations to new teachers.

We particularly take note that the district is providing professional development that is directly related to the reform efforts in math and science, providing instructional materials to encourage and support hands-on instruction, and devoting resources and time for facilitators to coordinate districtwide efforts to work directly with the RSI and LaSIP projects. Even with these rather unique emphases and attention, there is still much to be accomplished, both in regard to thinking about the curriculum and instruction in terms of standards of quality instead of topical areas, i.e., the human body, plants, etc., and to implementing a curriculum that has meaning in the context of these students and this community.

While individuals cite perceived needs of students and the restricted world in which many have lived, the responses seem to be based on the initiatives of specific teachers and not as a part of a well-planned and coordinated school or districtwide plan.

Driver #2: Development of a coherent, consistent set of policies that supports provision of high-quality mathematics and science education for each student; excellent preparation, continuing education, and support for each mathematics and science teacher (including all elementary teachers); and administrative support for all persons who work to dramatically improve achievement among all students served by the system.

There is little evidence of formal policies that have been modified or developed in support of broad-based reform of math and science. Yet we see actions that are consistent with what would be the intent of such policies if they existed. For example, a variety of resources from both local and external grant programs are used to support voluntary and mandatory professional development for teachers. Materials have been purchased for professional development programs and then made

available for use in the classrooms by participating teachers. Lands around schools have been identified and designated for use as "nature trails" and natural environments for instruction. New positions have been created and staffed to provide leadership and assistance in the reform of science and math and the implementation of a standards-based curriculum.

We do not see policies or specific activities to attract or retain persons who are qualified or particularly effective science and math teachers. However, there is such a large overall problem in attracting teachers to this district that to single out math and science teachers as an emphasis might just lead to further futility.

There are no policies related to consequences of nonsupportive teachers with regard to teaching a standards-based curriculum. However, the results of mandated testing may be used administratively for employment decisions.

Further, we don't see policies or practices that are specifically in response to formally identified needs of students. There is an overall perception that most students will accept low-paying jobs requiring minimal skills in the immediate area and that they will not pursue formal postsecondary education. While this may be reality now, this mind-set may also ensure that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Assessment was seldom mentioned as an important consideration except in the context of the state-mandated testing that appears to be quite stressful on students. Instances in which students showed uncontrolled emotions and signs of illness, e.g., upset stomachs, nausea, etc., were well known. We were not informed of any actions that had been taken or were planned with regard to teacher employment or assignment as a result of state-mandated tests.

With the exception of Slaughter Elementary School, the use of unqualified teachers is a common practice, and there are no local policies that indicate that anything higher than the state's minimal requirements are used in employment and retention of teachers.

Driver #3: Convergence of the usage of all resources that are designed for or that reasonably could be used to support science and mathematics education—fiscal, intellectual, materials, curricular, and extracurricular—into a focused and unitary program to constantly upgrade, renew, and improve the educational program in mathematics and science for all students.

The parish has made a concerted effort to gather discretionary resources to support the K-8 mathematics improvement initiative (Project SMILE). These resources include federal funds (Title I, II, VII) and other state and federal resources made available through the Delta RSI and the LaSIP program, both sponsored by the National Science Foundation. These funds were used to support summer leadership institutes (consultants, teacher stipends, and materials), which included two weeks of staff development for selected teachers followed by two weeks with students to practice the use of new content and instructional strategies.

Virtually no funds are available from the regular operating budget due to the limited ability to raise funds locally. (It was reported by a middle school teacher that even duplicating paper was rationed.)

At the time of the visit, the mathematics efforts, which constitute most of the RSI initiative in this school district, have not tapped intellectual resources beyond those found in the public school setting. An exception to this might be the efforts to involve faculty members from LSU, Southern, and Southeast Louisiana University, all with mixed success.

Work is now under way to expand the RSI-supported efforts to K-8 science. The parish science facilitator is in the process of convening agencies in the community, e.g., the Forest Service, Soil Conservation, etc., to explore how their educational outreach initiatives can be supportive of school parish efforts to improve science teaching and learning.

Further questioning revealed that many of the persons in facilitation and coordination roles have multiple programmatic commitments, and their salaries to support their efforts are generally from a conglomerate of sources that reflect their duties and responsibilities.

Whether by design or simply an activity that has grown out of necessity, the creation of the mathematics and science facilitator positions in a school of this size is rare, but it appears to be a reasonable reaction to the lack of qualified and certified teachers.

Overall, a "focused and unitary program to constantly upgrade, renew, and improve the educational program in mathematics and science for all students" is in a very embryonic stage.

Driver #4: Broad-based support from parents, policymakers, institutions of higher education, business and industry, foundations, and other segments of the community for the goals and collective value of the program, based on rich presentations of the ideas behind the program, the evidence gathered about its successes and its failures, and critical discussions of its efforts.

Evidence to support the presence of this driver in the East Feliciana Parish School District is very limited. It was reported that the Board of Education has been "in-serviced" on the RSI and the SMILE staff development program. No evidence was provided that this had resulted in policy changes that would be more supportive of additional parish financial resources.

Efforts to garner support from parents included the preparation of "refrigerator skills" reminders of math skills that can be reinforced at home and a parents' "math night" designed to inform and engage parents in math activities designed to meet state standards.

Driver #5: Accumulation of a broad and deep array of evidence that the program is enhancing student achievement, through a set of indices that might include achievement test scores, higher level courses passed, college admission rates, college majors, Advanced Placement Tests taken, portfolio assessment, and ratings from summer employers, and that demonstrate that students are generally achieving at a higher level in science and mathematics.

Although there are a number of individuals and initiatives working to improve student achievement in mathematics and to a lesser extent in science, a number of factors make broad-based systematic improvements in the East Feliciana Parish schools a very difficult goal to achieve. The Delta RSI has

succeeded in helping dedicated professionals in the district introduce reforms that, although in the early stages of implementation, have enjoyed a degree of success.

Project SMILE has served as a catalyst for change in the way that mathematics is perceived and taught. Clearly, there is a direct linkage in the establishment and operation of this program and the Delta RSI. The project provided funding that enabled teachers to create activities that introduced manipulatives and other hands-on approaches to mathematics instruction. The transfer between workshop and classroom has been successful for many of the teachers who were involved. In addition to the hands-on classroom approaches, the family math night and refrigerator math were cited as having been successful in improving teaching, which may or may not equate to an increase in student achievement test scores.

The aforementioned reform efforts and others described earlier in this document have not directly affected the high school. By design, the school district chose to limit the focus of its initial efforts to mathematics at the lower grade levels. As a result, many of the typical indicators of student achievement, e.g., graduation rates, enrollments in advanced science classes, college majors in the sciences, etc., are not applicable.

The state of Louisiana has implemented a high-stakes assessment and accountability system in which students in grades 4 and 8 will be promoted only after passing mandated examinations. The mathematics section of the examination involves a great deal of problem solving with much less focus on computation. Individuals involved with Project SMILE are hopeful that the problem-solving focus of the project will prove beneficial to the students. Other measures employed by the East Feliciana Parish schools include the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the ACT test for college- bound students. No evidence of alignment between the tests and the curriculum in the schools was found.

There does not appear to be any systemic accountability system in place beyond the aforementioned standardized and state-mandated tests. Considering the dropout rate, which was reported to be approximately 13 percent after the 9th grade, and the relatively low percentage of graduates who attend college (approximately 25 percent), there is a question as to how serious students actually take the mandated tests. In the past decision making with regard to curriculum and instruction did not seem to be the result of any systematic evaluation of accountability data. However, in recent years there is evidence that the test data are being examined in a more analytical way in order to identify apparent weaknesses in the effectiveness of instruction in certain areas, including mathematics. A parallel effort was not observed in the area of science.

The implementation of RSI-related activities is in the early stages with regard to mathematics and in the embryonic stages with regard to science. Data regarding the success of the new activities are primarily anecdotal and word of mouth. There was no direct observation of a formative evaluation strategy or evidence of any written strategic plan. Again, the ability to embark on a comprehensive evaluation plan is severely compromised by the personnel issues, i.e., high teacher turnover and limited time, experience, and expertise in developing and operating a comprehensive evaluation system.

The potential increase in the number of students exposed to new curricula in mathematics and science depends upon circumstances outside the control of the RSI. Students fortunate enough to be with teachers who have availed themselves of the initiatives and workshops supported by the RSI will potentially benefit from the experience. Unless teacher attrition declines and with it the number of noncertified/unqualified teachers who are employed along with the number of substitutes and less-motivated teachers who are tolerated due to the shortage and attrition problems, the number of students positively affected by an ongoing program in mathematics and science that is informed by current research and best practice will be minimal at best.

As previously reported, the East Feliciana public schools experience a high student dropout rate. Of those who remain in school, only about 25 percent seek postsecondary education. It does not appear that any systematic investigation of the dropouts or the graduates is currently in place.

Driver #6: Improvement in the achievement of all students, including those historically underserved.

Eighty percent of the students in the East Feliciana Parish School District are African American or black. In the main, this fact mitigates the intent of the driver. All discussions regarding the school and the students are de facto discussions about historically underserved students. All of the aforementioned successes, failures, and challenges involve this historically identified underserved component of schoolchildren and youth.

The East Feliciana Parish public schools are involved in efforts to improve student performance in mathematics and science classes as well as on standardized tests in those subject areas. With the help of the RSI, reform efforts have begun. Project SMILE has energized mathematics instruction for a number of teachers, and the addition of a science facilitator has similarly energized the science curriculum. The visiting team observed the use of manipulatives in mathematics classrooms and the utilization of a natural science outdoor laboratory in elementary school science. Although these initiatives are too new to be evaluated, tangible evidence in the form of math night, refrigerator math, the beginnings of a written K-12 curriculum aligned with state standards, and the newly created nature trails and outdoor laboratory indicates that efforts are in progress.

Concluding Statement

East Feliciana Parish is representative of a great many rural, poor, heavily minority areas of the country. The schools, modeled after the urban/industrial one-best-system, operate in a culture where quality education is not highly valued for all children. For the poor and the powerless, there are other priorities that are more urgent, e.g., putting food on the table, finding adequate housing, dealing with an array of family problems/issues (teenage pregnancies, drugs, etc.) in a community that offers few opportunities for improving one's socioeconomic situation. The needs of the students and the

Table 3

Rating of Educational System Reform Drivers

	Driver	Rating*
1.	Implementation of standards-based curriculum . . .	1-2
2.	Policies supportive of quality math and science programs . . .	1
3.	Convergence and usage of resources to support math and science programs . . .	2
4.	Broad-based support and involvement of parents and others . . .	1
5.	Accumulation of broad and deep array of evidence that the program is enhancing student achievement . . .	1
6.	Improvement in the achievement of all students, including the historically underserved . . .	0-1

* 0 = Not present/no evidence; 1 = Weak evidence/beginning but sporadic; 2 = Moderate evidence/developing but visible success; and 3 = Strong evidence/operationally consistent and widespread

expectations of the "school system," as defined by state mandates and legislative/regulatory action, are a poor fit. For those with resources to find quality education outside the public system, few are sufficiently concerned to push for equal educational opportunities within the public schools.

At the same time, there is a sense of settling into the patterns of previous generations with regard to education and employment, i.e., go to school until you can find a job in one of the several state institutions in the parish. As a result there is not strong support or value in education among a large portion of the citizens and little reason felt to change that attitude. Of course, there are exceptions to these generalizations, and these individuals are commended for their efforts. During our study visit, we met such individuals who are employees of the schools, parents, and residents (blacks and whites, wealthy and poor) of the parish.

East Feliciana Parish has the kind of school system that the RSI is targeted to serve. Unfortunately, the intervention supported by the RSI and LaSIP is not a good match with the immediate needs of most of the residents (including children and youth), nor is the intervention powerful enough to make much of a difference. Designing a standards-based curriculum that aligns with the state and national standards is of questionable value if there is no way to fully implement that curriculum and, perhaps more importantly, if it does not connect with needs of the student/community that it serves. Efforts to inform teachers about best practices in math and science education are fruitless when you have an annual turnover of 50-70 percent. Even then, the school district is unable to attract teachers who are prepared (certified or qualified) to teach math and science. The local effort to provide facilitators for

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these two critical areas is an admirable accomplishment and one that could be replicated in other similar school systems.

We commend the district in its decision to focus the RSI and LaSIP efforts into a locally created entity (Project SMILE) and a manageable portion of the curriculum (mathematics at the elementary and middle school levels), with plans to expand into science and other grade levels. While the resources to support Project SMILE are only sufficient for minor interventions, the impact on students appears to be positive. Students tend to be engaged in the learning activities and in some cases even finding learning can be fun! This is clearly not the case with the other half of systemic reform: high stakes testing. Here the impact is downright destructive, particularly for the student population. One elementary principal (breaking down into tears) stated that students become emotionally upset and physically ill (including vomiting) as a result of the pressure by the system to do well on the tests.

We are disappointed, but not necessarily surprised, that there is not more tangible evidence of student achievement (not necessarily test scores). Reform and substantive improvement of an educational system steeped in a tradition of minimal support and low expectations and separated from the more highly educated and wealthier students who are in eyesight of some of the public schools is a challenge that few would relish. We commend those teachers and administrators who are willing to devote their time and effort to this process, knowing full well that they have other professional opportunities and career choices that would be more financially rewarding and likely less difficult.

The reform and improvement efforts in East Feliciana Parish School District are in an embryonic stage. The potential barriers and challenges to this effort go beyond the schoolhouse door. In this case and like so many others in rural America, there is a need to change the community's perception of school quality and value and to raise its expectations for the schools as well as the educational attainment of their children and to provide the resources for professionals to be adequately compensated for their work and for students to have what they need to achieve in an environment conducive to learning. The National Science Foundation RSI and other programs like this may best be used as a catalyst for action, rather than a ready solution to a problem. While standards and systems of accountability are politically popular, the impact of their implementation has both positive and negative consequences, both of which are clearly evident in this school and community.

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